

GRAEME HALL NATURE SANCTUARY, INC.

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Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary Closes

After years of providing educational and environmental programmes to tens of thousands of children and adults, Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary closed on Monday to the public.

“The last day went well, but most people were too hurt and emotional to really speak to me,” said Harry Roberts, General Manager of the Sanctuary. “The closing of GHNS is similar to losing a close friend, so much has been extended not only by me but some of the most committed and cooperative staff that one could find anywhere in the world.”

A small maintenance and security staff will maintain the bird aviaries and provide minimal ecosystem services until a final decision is made about the future of the Sanctuary.

Roberts was pensive about his staff. “Through their efforts we ran a world class attraction and educational centre, unmatched anywhere in the Caribbean, not only for visitors but for Barbadians as well. I can only hope that it is possible for the Sanctuary to be re-opened as quickly as possible,” said Roberts.

Sanctuary officials confirmed that there is strong support from various Ministries, and that there have been positive discussions with government about keeping the Sanctuary open on an interim basis until a permanent action plan for the overall green space at Graeme Hall could be developed.

In 2007, over 6,000 Barbadians signed a Friends of Graeme Hall petition that had been submitted to the previous administration in favor of preserving the approximately 240-acre green area at Graeme Hall, and to protect its RAMSAR wetland and wildlife reserve with low-density open and recreational upland buffers.

As the largest and most significant green space remaining in the urban South Coast communities between the Airport and Bridgetown, the proposed green area would include the designated 81-acre RAMSAR wetland approved under the international Convention on Wetlands, the 35-acre Sanctuary, private lands owned by Clico and other smaller landowners, and recreational lands.

However, the undeveloped lands outside of the 81-acre RAMSAR wetland are currently zoned for residential and urban corridor development according to the current Physical Development Plan. Officials acknowledged that if such development happened, it would likely kill a majority of the mangrove woodland and wetland ecosystem within Graeme Hall's RAMSAR site.

Officials also said that the area needed to be preserved and managed using sound scientific approaches to ensure the health of the wetland and its upland buffers, and that much of the information needed by government to develop a “Master Action Plan” for the Graeme Hall area had already been produced and consolidated by Coastal Zone Management Unit staff.

More information can be found at www.graemehall.com/press and www.graemehallnationalpark.org .

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